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The Ambassador

Newfoundland & Labrador • Canada

Bringing Newfoundland and Labrador to the World

In This Issue...

• Find out why the Craft, Gift and Apparel sector in Newfoundland and Labrador is so successful.

• A Labrador-based company recently landed a distribution agreement with DPI Midwest, one of the largest importer distributors in the United States.

Did You Know

• There are more than 2,000 professional craftspeople currently working in Newfoundland and Labrador producing work worth more than $38 million.

• CBC Artspots showcases Newfoundland and Labrador Artists as a regular feature. Check out some local artists at http://www.cbc.ca/artspots/html/artists

• The A1C postal region, near St. John's Harbour, has 250 artists among an overall labour force of 7,515.

• Crafts of Character has become a recognized symbol of quality craft, gift and apparel products made in Newfoundland and Labrador. http://www.craftsofcharacter.com

• The Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador is leading an exhibition of Canadian artists to the Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show in November 2007. www.craftcouncil.nf.ca or www.canadiancraftsfederation.ca

• The Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development presented an award at the Atlantic Craft Trade Show in February 2006 in memory of Heather Stone. Heather, a former employee of the department, passed away last spring after a long and courageous battle with cancer. The creation of the Heather Stone Emerging Artist Award gives tribute to her dedicated years of service to the craft industry.

• Brad Gushue's curling rink became the first Canadian men to win Olympic curling gold and the first Newfoundland and Labrador-based athletes to win Olympic gold.

RAY COX
turning craft into art

With his round head, laughing eyes, brawny arms and drooping mustache, Ray Cox could be a cowboy from the Old Wild West. Actually, he's a pewter-smith from Connecticut who came to Newfoundland and Labrador in 1972 and stayed.

"I went to school at St. Mary's in Halifax and met a lot of Newfoundlanders," he explains.

He enjoyed them so much he came to Memorial University and studied folklore. Today, he makes his living entirely from creating pewter works of art. Last year one of his cast pewter bowls was given to Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles as a wedding present by then Governor General Adrienne Clarkson.

"I wondered if it might lead Camilla to change her name to Camilla Pewter Bowls," he jokes.

The road from Connecticut to Quidi Vidi Pewter on Quidi Vidi Road in St. John's where Ray lives and keeps a studio is long with many turns, and also a journey of self-discovery.

Ray began making leather belts in the great crafts revival of the 1960s and needed pewter buckles to finish them. Coincidentally, Connecticut was one of the centres of American Colonial pewter-smithing where he had seen pewter mugs, plates and spoons in museums.

"I remember handling the stuff and thinking, I bet I could make something like this."

Ray was also fortunate to study under pewter-smith Frances Felten, a central figure in all North American pewter work. Frances was interested in highly polished hammered pewter, which Ray still does occasionally, but Ray's interest in pewter today is in a far more fluid expression of the metal.

Pewter is a mixture of tin and copper, mostly tin, and it melts at very low temperatures. This allows Ray to make what he calls air cast bowls.

Photo credit: Eric Walsh

Ray Cox, Quidi Vidi Pewter

"Basically, it's throwing liquid metal into a stainless steel bowl and moving it around," he says of the process he invented, which is similar to cooking an omelette, but the egg is molten pewter. He has been making cast bowls for more than 15 years.

His other major interest is coloured pewter, also a process he invented. Just as copper pipes change colour when soldered, pewter takes on a range of colours when heated. For more than six years, Ray experimented to trap the colours and make them permanent. Having perfected the process he now makes pewter schooners, whales, whales tails, fish and mummers as coloured, two-dimensional sculptures that can be matted and framed.

Ray also makes pieces for corporate clients. He produces the awards for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's annual Export Awards. His work is sold across Canada and in the United States.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

MICHAEL MASSIE

Photo credit: JoAnn Massie

Michael Massie with Shape Shifting Shaman

Michael Massie is a master sculptor and silversmith with an irreverent sense of humour. Some of his stately Stirling silver teapots look fit to grace the table of royalty. In some of his other pieces, his sculptures may start with traditional Inuit themes, but the finished product is often quite different: owls with bear's feet, a rabbit with a walrus' head, a polar bear with a wooden flipper. Collectors who buy his work do so as much for the story behind the piece as for its exquisite workmanship.

Born in Happy Valley-Goose Bay in 1962, Michael is of Inuit, Metis and Scottish descent. From the age of five, Michael has drawn. At eight he copied cartoon strips to develop his hand and eye. While he loved art, making a career at it was hard. The turning point came in 1986 when he enrolled in the Visual Arts Program at the Bay St. George Community College in Stephenville and was finally able to work with other artists.

He went on to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design to earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts in jewelry, and he studied carving under two prominent Inuit artists. His interest in teapots came from watching his grandmother, May Baikie, an avid tea drinker. He is also fascinated by the ulu, a round blade, multi-use knife used by Inuit women, which appears in his work.

Michael is now receiving commercial recognition. When a Vancouver gallery held a solo exhibition of his work in October 2005, purchasers were allowed to buy only one piece each which carried price tags of $2,000 to $6,000. The gallery sold 15 pieces in three days.

Although his work has been exhibited in Washington, displayed in the Hurd Museum in Arizona and the National Gallery in Ottawa, he is less well known in his own province. In June of this year an exhibition of his work is to be held in St. John's at The Rooms.

http://www.spiritwrestler.com/catalog/

RAY COX

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Despite a growing customer base, Ray still considers himself a craftsman rather than an artist, but admits his work has become art and is sold that way. He is staunchly individualistic and resists suggestions he might buy machines and industrialize his process. He likes living simply with his two kids a few steps from his studio.

"I still think there is room for people to work with simple tools and simple methods and be successful," he says.

Perhaps Ray has more in common with a 19th century western cowboy than he realizes.

www.quidividipewter.com

LABRADOR PRESERVES
northern sweets for the American dinner table

Stelman Flynn, owner of Labrador Preserves in Forteau, spent a decade researching and refining his gourmet jams and syrups. His company is well known in Newfoundland and Labrador gift shops and specialty stores where tourists snap up his unique northern berry products. Now successful in the local marketplace, Flynn has his sights set on American kitchens.

Labrador Preserves - Jellies and Syrups

Labrador Preserves makes partridgeberry (lingonberry) and bakeapple (cloudberry) spreads and syrups, products typically imported to the United States from Sweden. In the U.S. market, Flynn is concentrating on promoting Labrador Preserves syrups for use in cooking and as a dessert topping.

Two years of market planning, three trade missions and numerous meetings with potential distributors contributed to Labrador Preserves' success in the U.S. at the Team Canada Atlantic trade mission in Chicago in October, 2005.

The company landed a distribution agreement with DPI Midwest, one of the largest importer distributors in the United States. DPI Midwest will distribute Labrador Preserves through catalogue and retail channels, and through the 176 stores of Whole Foods Market, the world's largest retailer of natural and organic foods.

Labrador Preserves also secured an agreement with Chicago Importing, a large importer of Scandinavian foods to the U.S., to distribute Labrador Preserves under their "Lars Own" private label and will target specialty food niche markets in catalogue and retail channels.

Flynn's foray into the U.S. marketplace, though a well-charted course, has seen the occasional pothole and bump in the road. Most recently, the United States Food and Drug Administration required Labrador Preserves to re-label their products for distribution in the U.S. Flynn says this technicality will only slightly delay his products entry into the American market.

The company also distributes its products across Canada through Winners and Home Sense outlets. Now that Labrador Preserves is about to be introduced to the American dinner table, Flynn has his sights set on securing more U.S. distributors.

www.preserves.nf.ca

HANNAH BANANA
balancing labour with love

Is it possible to be considered an entrepreneur with twenty years of business experience? It is where St. John's clothing designer and entrepreneur Carolann Pollett is concerned.

"Being an entrepreneur is very dynamic. Just when I think I have it all figured out something new pops up," she says.

Pollett's latest venture, Hannah Banana Wear Inc., is the product of almost ten years of research, development and planning. It began with a simple idea generated as a result of purchasing clothing for her young daughter.

She remembers, "Back in 1997, there was always a lack of fun, funky kid's clothes that you could throw in a washer and dryer and would last for a long time."

A year later Pollett, who operates out of a studio in St. John's, started Hannah Banana as a two-year pilot project "to see if it could fly."

After the two-year period, she felt that the time just wasn't right but with more research and planning the venture could succeed. After shelving the idea for a couple of more years and changing the focus from retail to wholesale, Hannah Banana Wear Inc. was incorporated in August 2004. Now, halfway through her second year, Hannah Banana has quadrupled sales and secured wholesale accounts across Canada.

What's in a name? The name of the company comes from one of Pollett's three daughters and the design reflects the vibrancy and energy of youth but with practicality in mind.

"It's a really fun and brightly coloured clothing line you can throw in the wash and children look particularly cute in it," she says.

Hannah Banana Clothing

Photo credit: Sheelagh O'Leary

To be a successful entrepreneur, Pollett has to balance the creative side with the business side. She completed a Vocational Education degree with a minor in business and advises budding entrepreneurs to seek out business training where possible.

She says, "Take advantage of any training that focuses on business basics such as management and accounting. You must learn the business side or partner with someone who has a business background."

Being the sole creative force and also responsible for the company's financial operations, she's very conscious of the balance she must maintain in order to be successful.

"Once you have the line designed you have to be totally committed to the business side, but all the while keeping the next line in the back of your mind."

After a recent successful trade mission to Iceland with two other local apparel companies, the perpetual entrepreneur still quotes the entrepreneurial credo:

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

www.hannahbananawear.com

IMAGES IN SLATE
rock solid craft - we deliver anywhere

John Hurley's office is located in an industrial building on a tale mine site outside the town of Manuels in Conception Bay South. Heavy machinery moves rock cut from the top of the hill into the building and around the site. There's a steady whirr from the activity inside broken only by the crash of production outside.

Images in Slate - house number identifier

Hurley's company, Images in Slate, was formed in 1992. It's a spin-off of his Hurley Slate Works, a manufacturer and international distributor of slate roof tile. Images in Slate wasn't a new idea. Hurley had seen several smaller craft businesses operating in slate quarries in western Europe. Slate quarries produce a tremendous amount of waste material in their normal production cycle. Craft producers take this by-product and produce small volume items like clocks, coasters, boxes and signage items for the craft, commercial retail and corporate gift markets.

Images in Slate manufactures a variety of slate products, from commercial and residential signage, to products for the retail gift market. But it is the corporate gift market where Hurley's company has become something like a craft producer on steroids.

"In North America, corporate gift giving is valued at about $16 billion annually," says Hurley. Each year Images in Slate is increasing its share of this growing market. "The key is wanting to take your business to the next level," Hurley explained.

"No one else in North America is doing what we do at the level we're doing it. We went to a trade show in Las Vegas; and out of 1800 exhibitors, we were the only one marketing slate product. It makes us a niche product in a large international market."

Images in Slate exports 98 per cent of its product to individuals, small gift shops and Fortune 500 companies.

"We produced 36,000 sets of coasters for Chrysler Canada, and drop shipped them to hundreds of locations across the country, in time for a nationwide launch last year."

Images in slate - booth display

Hurley believes the key to expanding is managing growth, from supplying the local market to being a high volume exporter. He offers advice for small producers in Newfoundland and Labrador.

"Anyone that's making craft in this province has opportunity in outside markets. The key is taking that business from your backyard shed and managing growth while meeting the demands of all your customers," says Hurley who started his business in a two-car garage. "Don't limit your market to the provincial borders. We now have a 7000 sq. ft. facility, and we're producing product and selling it all over North America. It can be done with any type of product."

Imagesinslate.com

LUBEN BOYKOV

home is where the art is

"Our plan was to stay for a week and then move on to Montreal or Toronto. Sixteen years later we're still here and firmly rooted."

In 1990, Bulgarian artist Luben Boykov, his wife, painter Elena Popova, and their infant daughter boarded a plane for Cuba. When the plane stopped to refuel in Gander, the family seized an opportunity to start a new life. They immediately exited the plane and sought political asylum.

Although they intended to move on to a larger Canadian centre where integration might have been easier, they had already started a new life in this province without really trying.

Boykov remembers, "We met a few friends and saw opportunities in terms of work. Slowly, day after day, week after week, we realized that this was the perfect place for us. Gradually, we had fallen in love with Newfoundland and Labrador."

And Newfoundland and Labrador has fallen in love with Luben Boykov's artwork. So much so that the sculptor received the Artist of the Year Award in 2001. This award represents the highest level of artistic achievement bestowed by the province.

Boykov's life is dedicated to art. Starting at age seven, he apprenticed with his father for seven years. In 1974, at age 14, he began formal studies and by 1986 had completed a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Masters degree in Fine Arts.

Luben Boykov - Gate of Faith (My Father and I)

Luben Boykov

Today, Boykov continues to create and innovate. In 1991, he co-founded the Garden Studio and Foundry in Logy Bay and Flatrock. Partnering with a biology professor from Memorial University, they endeavored to establish an environmentally friendly foundry.

"It's one of only a few, if not the only one, of its kind in North America," says Boykov.

The artist-run studio and foundry, which has a six-and-a-half acre sculpture park, employs three full-time people year round and two-to-three part-time employees during the busy summer months.

Has the province influenced his art?

"It has profoundly," Boykov says. "The combination of the physical beauty, the rigid natural character and the poetic beauty is really conducive to a more concentrated focus."

www.sculpturebyluben.com

HELP spread the message!

Thank you for reading this edition of The Ambassador newsletter. We are always looking for ways to reach as many people as possible with the good news about business in Newfoundland and Labrador. If this copy of *The Ambassador* was mailed to you, pass it along, or request extra copies so you can help spread the news. If you're reading someone else's copy of the newsletter, contact us and we will put you on our mailing list. See our contact information at right.

GET YOUR E-NEWS!

The company profiles you read in each issue of the Ambassador newsletter are just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. There's so much more happening in Newfoundland and Labrador, more than we can possibly fit into a newsletter.

That's why we have the Ambassador E-News. It's a periodical e-mail we send to all of our Ambassadors and subscribers. It has links to cu[illegible]at news, conferences and events, local media, economic facts and all the great things happening in our province. But we can't keep you up to date if we don't know how to reach you. Simply send us your e-mail address to ambassador@gov.nl.ca and we'll be happy to add you to the list.

Newfoundland & Labrador Canada

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Ambassador Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Innovation, Trade and Rural Development
P.O. Box 8700, St. John's, NL, Canada A1B 4J6
Tel: 709-729-1326 Fax: 709-729-6627 E-mail: ambassador@gov.nl.ca Website: www.theambassador.ca